

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-12 TRSE-00 OMB-01 IO-13 /095 W
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R 210735Z OCT 77

FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4369
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 10505

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

3.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PK, PINT
SUBJECT: WHITHER ZIA?

SUMMARY - ZIA IS FOLLOWING A TWO-TRACK STRATEGY IN HIS ATTEMPT
TO ENSURE BHUTTO'S POLITICAL DEMISE. HE HOPES GUILTY
VERDICTS IN THE CASES AGAINST THE FORMER PM AND THE BREAK-UP
OF THE PPP WILL AID IN BHUTTO'S DESTRUCTION. THERE IS
PROGRESS ON BOTH TRACKS - THE TRIALS ARE PROCEEDING AND
POLITICAL REALIGNMENTS ARE EXPECTED.

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HOWEVER IT IS POSSIBLE THAT AFTER THE TRIALS AND A
PPP BREAK-UP, BHUTTO WILL HAVE A GREATER PUBLIC FOLLOWING.
THIS WOULD BE EVEN MORE LIKELY IF ZIA CANNOT FIND A
CHARISMATIC PERSON TO FILL BHUTTO'S POPULIST ROLE. WE DO
NOT BELIEVE ZIA WANTS OR IS READY TO TAKE THE DRACONIAN
STEP OF ORDERING BHUTTO'S EXECUTION IF HE IS FOUND GUILTY
IN THE JUDICIAL PROCESS. HOWEVER, ZIA MAY FIND THAT HE

CANNOT VOLUNTARILY DISMOUNT THE POLITICAL TIGER HE IS RIDING. IF SO, PAKISTAN WILL FACE LONG-TERM MILITARY RULE WITH DELETERIOUS RESULTS FOR THE ARMY, THE ECONOMY AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM. END SUMMARY.

1. GENERAL ZIA IS, AGAINST HIS PERSONAL PREDILECTIONS, SETTLING IN FOR A LONGER STAY THEN HE ORIGINALLY PLANNED. WHILE WE STILL BELIEVE ZIA'S PROTESTATIONS THAT HE DOES NOT WANT THE MANTLE OF LEADERSHIP, HE IS TRAPPED BY HIS OWN ANTI-BHUTTO STANCE, AND AS LONG AS THE THREAT OF A BHUTTO COME-BACK EXISTS, HE CANNOT AFFORD TO GIVE UP POWER.

2. ZIA IS ACTIVELY SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO ENSURE BHUTTO'S POLITICAL DEMISE. HE SEES TWO SEPARATE BUT SIMULTANEOUSLY EMPLOYED TACTICS AS THE BEST WAY TO ACHIEVE THAT AIM. ON ONE TRACK, HE HOPES THAT AS BHUTTO IS FOUND GUILTY IN THE MANY JUDICIAL CASES AGAINST HIM, THE FORMER PM'S VENALITY AND CORRUPTION WILL EVENTUALLY COST HIM PUBLIC SUPPORT. ON A SEPARATE TRACK, ZIA IS ENCOURAGING THE BREAK-UP OF THE PPP AND A CONSEQUENT REALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL FORCES IN THE HOPE THAT WITHOUT THE POLITICAL VEHICLE WHICH BHUTTO BUILT AND LED, HIS POLITICAL POTENCY WILL BE DESTROYED.

3. THE TRIALS AGAINST BHUTTO ARE PROCEEDING IN THE LEISURELY MANNER TYPICAL OF THE PAKISTANI JUDICIAL SYSTEM. CONFIDENTIAL

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THE CONTEMPT CASES IN LAHORE HAVE BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL EARLY NOVEMBER WHILE THE SUPREME COURT CASE IN WHICH BEGUM BHUTTO IS CHALLENGING THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF MARTIAL LAW PROCEEDS. ALTHOUGH THE COURT CASES COULD TAKE EVEN LONGER THAN THE SIX MONTHS ESTIMATED BY ZIA, WE BELIEVE IT IS EXTREMELY UNLIKELY THAT BHUTTO WILL BE JUDICIALLY EXONERATED. THERE ARE ENOUGH CASES FILED AND, WE UNDERSTAND, ENOUGH SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE AGAINST THE FORMER PM TO FIND HIM GUILTY IN SEVERAL OF THE CASES.

4. AS THE FIRST PART OF ZIA'S STRATEGY TOTTERS ALONG, RUMORS OF MOVEMENT ON THE SECOND FRONT - THE BREAK-UP OF THE PPP - CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE. THE BBC CORRESPONDENT HAS TOLD EMBOFF THAT BHUTTO'S DAUGHTER BENAZIR SAID THAT THE "REAL" PARTY, MEANING BEGUM BHUTTO'S MORE RADICAL FACTION, WILL SOON EXPEL KAUSAR NIAZI, G. M. KHAR AND FORMER SIND CHIEF MINISTER Jatoi. WE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED BY SUCH AN EVENT; THE SO-CALLED RIGHTISTS LED BY NIAZI COULD HOWEVER, ACT FIRST, LEAVE THE PARTY AND ESTABLISH A NEW ONE MINUS THE LEFTISTS, OR POSSIBLY JOIN ASGHAR KAHN'S TEHRUK.

5. ONCE NIAZI AND HIS COLLEAGUES LEAVE THE PPP, THE POSSIBILITY THE PARTY UNDER BEGUM BHUTTO'S LEADERSHIP WILL TAKE TO THE STREETS TO DEMAND BHUTTO'S RELEASE GREATLY INCREASES. IF THE PARTY DOES CONFRONT THE GOVERNMENT THROUGH MASS DEMONSTRATIONS, IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE MARTIAL LAW AUTHORITIES WILL BAN THE PPP. LEADERS OF THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA), INCLUDING BEVJM WALI KHAN AND VARIOUS MUSLIM LEAGUERS, HAVE ALREADY CALLED FOR SUCH A BAN. EVEN AS MODERATE A POLITICIAN AS PNA SPOKESMAN PROFESSOR GHAFOOR HAS LENT HIS VOICE TO THOSE SUPPORTING THIS ACTION. THE BREAK-UP OF THE PARTY WILL CAUSE A REALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL FORCES INCLUDING, MOST PROBABLY, THE EVENTUAL DISSOLUTION OF THE PNA AS WELL. ASGHAR KHAN HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO STAKE OUT HIS
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POLITICAL TERRITORY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF WALI KHAN'S RELEASE FROM CUSTODY ADDS ANOTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENT TO THE POLITICAL SCENE. WE HAVE ALSO HAD INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THAT GENERAL ZIA MAY CONTEMPLATE FORMING A "MOVEMENT" BASED ON ISLAMIC IDEALS AND SUPPORTED BY SOME OF THE MORE CONSERVATIVE POLITICIANS IN THE COUNTRY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE PRESENT PARTY STRUCTURES.

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INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 10505

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

6. YET EVEN IF ZIA'S TWO-TRACK STRATEGY IS SUCCESSFUL -- BHUTTO IS FOUND GUILTY, THE PPP BREAKS UP AND NEW POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS EMERGE -- THERE IS STILL NO GUARANTEE BHUTTO WILL BE REMOVED AS A POLITICAL FORCE. ZIA MAY ONE DAY BE CONFRONTED WITH ONE OF THOSE POLITICAL IRONIES THAT PLAGUE PAKISTANI POLITICS: AFTER THE TRIALS AND THE BREAK-UP OF THE PARTY BHUTTO MAY HAVE EVEN GREATER POPULAR APPEAL AND PUBLIC FOLLOWING. THIS WOULD BE EVEN MORE LIKELY IF ZIA CANNOT FIND SOMEONE WITH THE CHARISMA, IMAGE AND DYNAMISM OF BHUTTO TO TAKE HIS PLACE IN THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION. TO GET RID OF BHUTTO, SOMEONE MUST FILL THE POPULIST "REVOLUTIONARY" POSITION HE HELD IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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HEARTS OF PAKISTANIS, AND THERE IS NO ONE READILY EVIDENT ON THE PAKISTANI POLITICAL SCENE WITH THE CREDENTIALS AND IDEOLOGY TO PLAY THAT ROLE.

7. SOME EVEN SPECULATE THAT HARDLINERS IN THE MILITARY MAY BE ABLE TO CONVINCE ZIA THE ONLY WAY TO SOLVE THE BHUTTO PROBLEM IS TO EXECUTE THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER AFTER THE GUILTY VERDICTS ARE GIVEN. WE BELIEVE THAT, FOR THE MOMENT, ZIA PRECLUDES SUCH A DRACONIAN STEP. NOT ONLY WOULD HE FIND IT PERSONALLY REPUGNANT TO ORDER OR EVEN ACQUIESCE IN SUCH A MEASURE, BUT ALSO HE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY PREFER TO FIND A MORE GRACEFUL SOLUTION. THE DIFFICULTY IS THERE DOES NOT SEEM TO BE ANY EASY WAY OUT, AND ZIA MAY NOT BE ABLE TO VOLUNTARILY DISMOUNT THE POLITICAL TIGER HE IS RIDING.

8. IF HE CANNOT, ELECTIONS WILL CONTINUE TO BE POSTPONED AND PAKISTAN WILL FACE LONG-TERM MILITARY RULE. GENERAL ZIA HONESTLY DOES NOT DESIRE SUCH AN OUTCOME. HE REALIZES THAT PLAYING A POLITICAL ROLE HAS TRADITIONALLY CORRUPTED THE ARMY AND BEEN DESTRUCTIVE OF THE INSTITUTION. ALSO, MARTIAL LAW WILL NOT, IN THE EYES OF MOST PAKISTANIS, AFFORD A LONG-TERM ANSWER TO THE NATION'S PRESSING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. ON THE ECONOMIC SIDE, PAKISTANI

BUSINESSMEN AND FOREIGN INVESTORS WILL BE RELUCTANT TO
MAKE INVESTMENT AND OTHER DECISIONS SO LONG AS THEY ARE
UNCERTAIN ABOUT HOW LONG ANY ANNOUNCED POLICY WILL LAST.
ON THE POLITICAL SIDE, UNEASE AND DISSATISFACTION WITH
MILITARY RULE IS ALREADY INCREASING IN PAKISTAN. ALTHOUGH
NO ONE IS CERTAIN WHAT THE LONG-TERM KEY TO ECONOMIC
CONFIDENCE AND POLITICAL STABILITY IS IN PAKISTAN, MOST
AGREE IT DOES NOT REST WITH THE MILITARY.

HUMMEL

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
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